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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes recent research on collaboration and integrated service delivery for schools and communities in North Carolina. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction commissioned three research projects to determine the general state of affairs in service delivery for school-age children and their families and to identify ways in which schools can collaborate with other human-service agencies in the state. The findings section is grouped into three parts. Part 1 discusses describes what is working and what is not working and offers lessons learned about effective collaboration. Part 2 discusses collaboration as a strategy to improve services and identifies some of the major stumbling blocks in the state's current systems. The third part presents frameworks for new client-centered designs, derived from case studies of 12 client-families and 5 emerging community collaboratives. In part 4, recommendations for designing a client-driven system include: (1) understand the desperation that first brings clients to ask for help; (2) include clients in the process; (3) remember that clients' best experiences are with individuals; (4) make information accessible to clients; and (5) provide a vision of the client's eventual self-sufficiency. Recommendations for developing a collaborative include: (1) recognize the ironic role of mandates; (2) define and understand differences and similarities openly; (3) establish neutral turf; (4) remember that collaboration is a vision, not an organization; and (5) involve the whole community, including the populations to be served. In the concluding section, 10 tips are offered to players at the state level. One table and one figure are included. (LMI)

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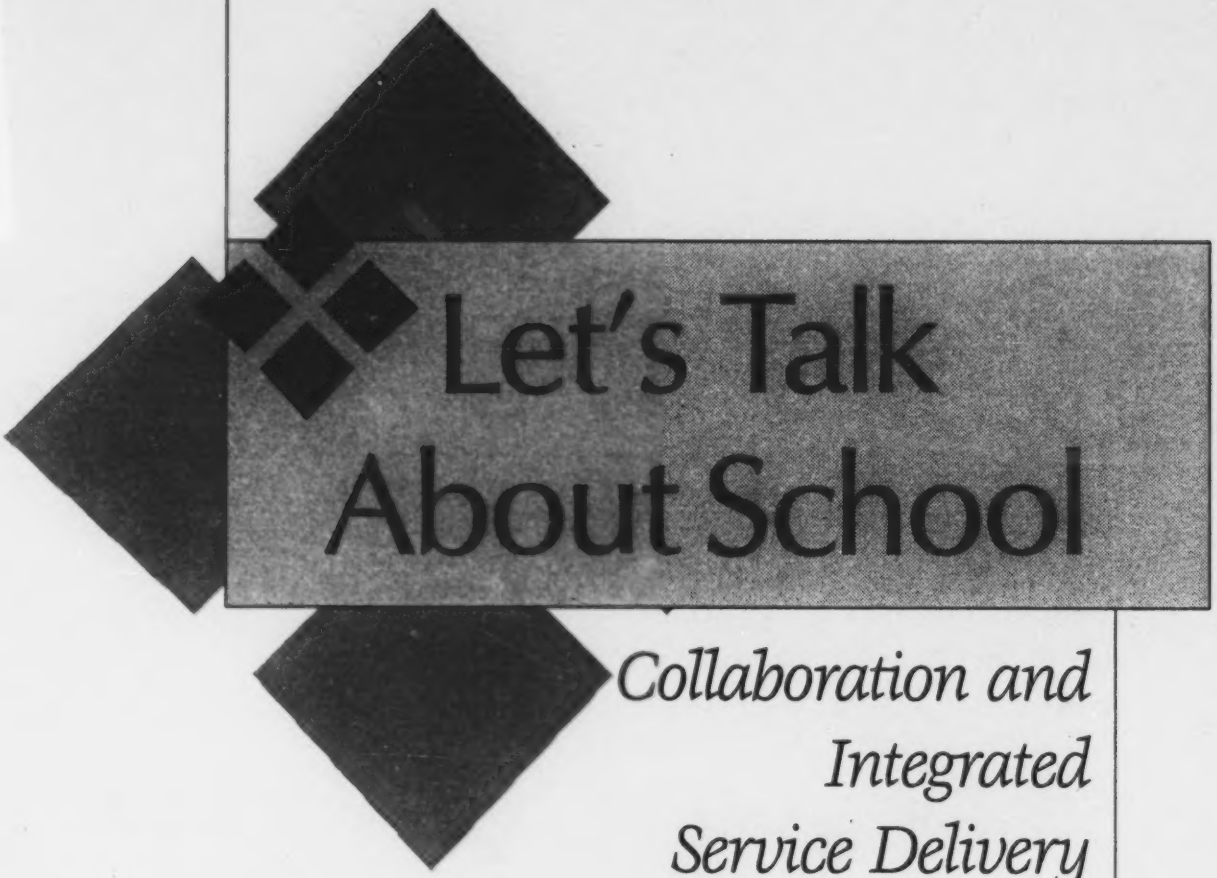

Let's Talk About School

Collaboration and Integrated Service Delivery

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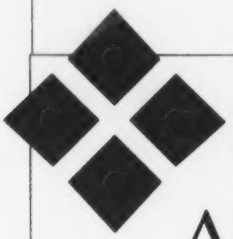

Let's Talk About School

Collaboration and Integrated Service Delivery

by Dee Brewer

Division of Development and Evaluation Services
Office of Accountability Services
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Bob Etheridge, State Superintendent

❖ Let's Talk About School

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❖ Foreword

In this report, we identify solutions to common flaws in North Carolina's fragmented systems of child and family support. *This report, Let's Talk About School: Collaboration and Integrated Service Delivery*, summarizes from recent research some of the central issues and challenges for schools and communities.

Collaboration, as used in this report, means agencies, organizations, or groups of people working together, sharing vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability. Working together in all these ways is necessary to meet the complete needs for children and their families. This approach calls for a high degree of participation, effort, and connectedness among partners.

Growing evidence that collaboration works has resulted in several major pieces of federal legislation that support interagency and community collaboration, including Goals 2000, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the Family Support Act, Head Start, Chapter 1, the Safe Schools Act. Since the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's collaborative research and other initiatives began five years ago, several pieces of state legislation were enacted that require collaboration including Senate Bill 2 and the Performance-Based Accountability Act, Smart Start, Safe Schools and Intervention/Prevention Initiatives. Clearly, support for collaboration has broadened and is characterized by many new constituents—business people, politicians, parents, and the media. Collaboration is being initiated both with and without mandates.

Families have the responsibility for raising children. Some families, however, need assistance from time to time, to provide the base for healthy child development. Schools cannot and should not fill the gaps alone. For North Carolina's citizens, these are not just social, educational, and safety problems. They are also economic development issues. If children do not have a suitable start in life, we will all pay the price. This report provides useful guidance to create new ways of doing business to strengthen North Carolina's number one resource: its children.

The full report of research results is included in a separate document entitled *Working Together?: The Report on Interagency Collaboration for Children and Their Families in North Carolina*. This series of studies on collaborative efforts in North Carolina profiles typical services for children and families in representative counties. We invite other human service agencies and organizations, both local and state, to take a close look at these findings as we work together to improve the over-all success of our investments and self-sufficiency of our families.

❖ Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of many hours of planning, field work, discussion, writing, and review. It is the product of the caring and commitment of a number of people who do not usually work together. The early work of Phyllis Jack and Margaret Harvey for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction regarding the status of North Carolina's children raised serious concerns that led to this research. We dedicate this publication to Harvey, Coordinator for the State Education Policy Seminars, from 1989-1992. Her early work on collaboration and integrated service delivery for children and families was the springboard for this research.

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the original NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) planning team that designed the research study. The research was designed and financially supported by the Division of Development and Evaluation Services and the Instructional Services area within NCDPI. The joint planning team included Jackie Colbert, who served as co-chair with Dee Brewer, Carolyn Cobb, Johnnie Grissom, Bobbye Draughon, Olivia Oxendine, Judy White, Anne Bryan, and John Stokes. The contributions of writer Pat Hill were important in this process.

We give special thanks to Suzanne Triplett, Assistant Superintendent of Accountability Services. We are grateful to Triplett for her continuing commitment to the value of collaboration for children and families and of those who serve them. We also appreciate the support of Henry Johnson, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, and the guidance and direction from Glenn Keever, Director of Communication Services. We were also fortunate to have had encouragement and advice along the way from Marty Blank, Senior Associate with teh Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C.

George Noblit, Principal Investigator from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been a pivotal team member. His insight, direction, patience, and enthusiasm kept everyone going during the challenging times.

Countless hours of field work, thoughtful discussion, carefully written descriptions and analyses of what we learned were the contributions of Dr. Noblit's graduate research team. Special thanks to Penny Richards, Catherine Awsumb, and Amee Adkins who helped manage the three phases of research. Our appreciation to the graduate research team including Amee Adkins, Catherine Awsumb, Jackie Blount, Laura Desimone, Wanda Hendrick, Kathy Hytten, Rhonda Baynes Jeffries, Deloris Jerman-Garrison, Brian McCadden, Jean Patterson, Maike Philipsen, Sue Randell, and Penny Richards.

We are grateful to John Niblock, President of the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, and Julie Rehder, Program Associate with the Institute, for their assistance with the project. Rehder also served as project manager for the phase of research that looked at service delivery from the client's point of view. She provided valuable suggestions and ideas throughout the project.

We agreed to maintain the anonymity of the six counties involved in the study entitled, **Lessons about Interagency Collaboration from Six Counties**. However, we would like to mention here our appreciation of their courage and honesty in working with the field researchers. In a like manner, we agreed to maintain the anonymity of the 12 women who courageously shared with us their life stories and their best advice to us as educators and service providers about how to better serve them. Their insights are included in the research report entitled, **From the Other Side of the Desk: Clients' Experiences with Government Services.**

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the five groups included in the study entitled, **Current Collaborative Initiatives.** That research looks at lessons from emerging community collaboratives in our state as they meet the challenges of actually redesigning service delivery. Those five groups include Caldwell County Communities in Schools (CIS), Cleveland County Communities in Schools, Cumberland County Coalition for Awareness, Resources and Education of Substances (CARES), Uplift, INC in Guilford County, and the Wake County Children's Initiative. Their stories provide concrete models for how the dilemmas of collaboration can be worked through to receive its rich rewards.

Finally, we express thanks to State Superintendent Bob Etheridge for his commitment to improve education, learning, quality in daily living, and future life chances of young people by our working together to better serve them.

❖ Let's Talk About School:

Collaboration and Integrated Service Delivery

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Let's Talk About School:
Collaboration and Integrated Service Delivery

For the good of the child and the community

Public education is not just about school. It is about whatever is happening with young people. It involves schools and the communities in which young people live. Many children are in jeopardy unless there are substantial changes in the ways they are educated, supported, and cared for. Far too many children are growing up unhealthy, unsafe, illiterate, and without adequate care and attention. These are all symptoms, not only of weakened families, but also of the failure of our current systems to support children and families.

Today, most school reformers recognize that we must pay attention to students, their families, and their communities if we are to improve schools and schooling. They realize that educated citizens are key to the community's vitality, including the economy, safety, health, and quality of life. The proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child." is not just for the good of the child; it is also for the good of the village. It is much less costly, in human terms as well as dollars, to prevent the problem or solve it early, than to wait for the time of crisis - or worse, to reach a time when human spirits are crushed, dreams are dead, and hope is lost.

Many children who come to school each day are not ready to learn; they are hungry, tired, sick, anxious, or angry. Success in school is not only determined in the classroom. Educators are faced daily with needs of children that reach far beyond the academic needs schools are intended to address. Addressing the diverse needs of young people is necessary so that children can come to school each day ready to learn. However, addressing these needs, which are numerous and growing in complexity, requires an increasing use of resources. No single agency can solve these problems alone. More needs of more families can be solved by agencies and others working together to provide services to the families that need help.

How our current system falls short

Our current systems of service delivery to children and families grew in fits and starts over the last century. It is misleading, however, to think of our services as a "system." What we really have is a patchwork of agencies, each created by separate legislation to meet a need at a particular time. As successful as various agencies are in meeting their legislative mandates, it is now apparent that the "goodness of fit" is lacking between the increasingly complex needs of children and families

and the structure and design of agency services. Likewise, there is little connectedness among the services when, at the same time, the problems of families are interrelated. At least part of the problem is that legislated agencies have developed ways of operating and logics in decision making that may be actual obstacles for the people they are mandated to serve (Noblit et al., 1993 a).

Physically scattered agencies with separate funding streams, differing eligibility requirements, and categorical services make it cumbersome and confusing for families to access needed help. Further, few programs are designed to allow early assistance so as to prevent problems before they become so unmanageable that the family is in crisis. Additionally, most communities have serious gaps in services, which means that many family needs may go unmet.

Have we been looking in the rear view mirror?

It is difficult to be both family-centered and community-based in the current categorical system. To focus on the full needs of families and communities is inconsistent with categorical funding, which only addresses needs for which funding is available and for which clients are eligible. Problems for which there is no funding or for which clients do not meet eligibility requirements likely remain unattended.

As we attempt to address these complex issues, many wheels are being reinvented. From all we are learning, we know that the change that is needed is not a new set of programs routinely applied without seeing how they fit the needs of people. There is no "one size fits all" solution. Communities need the flexibility and imagination to take a little from here and a little from there and create responses to their own needs.

The change that is needed is not merely adding new layers of reforms. Tinkering with the parts or adding new programs to an already overwhelmingly complicated system will not fix it. What is needed is to redesign the system of service delivery. This will require making tough decisions about what to do, what not to do, and how to do essential things more effectively.

It is important to think about bringing services together from the point-of-view of the client. The starting point and, in many cases, the goals are different when service delivery is determined from the outset by honoring the client's viewpoint. Plans are focused on solutions that are broad in scope, based on interrelated needs and strengths. Further, there are incentives and safeguards to ensure services that are responsive, comprehensive, feasible, timely, flexible, understandable, and meaningful to the person in terms of his or her own needs, beliefs, hopes, dreams, and goals. In assisting the family from a position of dependency to one of self-sufficiency, the aim of the goals also shifts from a focus on crisis management and client "deficits" to a focus on prevention, empowerment, and client strengths. The clients learn ongoing problem-solving skills to address needs before they become big problems and how to use family resources to improve quality of life.

Cooperation, coordination or collaboration?

A review of the literature yields few established definitions of collaboration. In fact many people use terms like collaboration, cooperation, and coordination interchangeably. Some, however, are coming to view collaboration on a continuum of "working together" to deliver services.

The continuum can be thought of as having two dimensions. One dimension looks at "working together" based on the degree of "separateness" or "connectedness" of agencies, from total separateness to a high degree of connectedness in terms of vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability. The other dimension looks at "working together" based on the degree of participation and effort of agencies toward common solutions for shared clients.

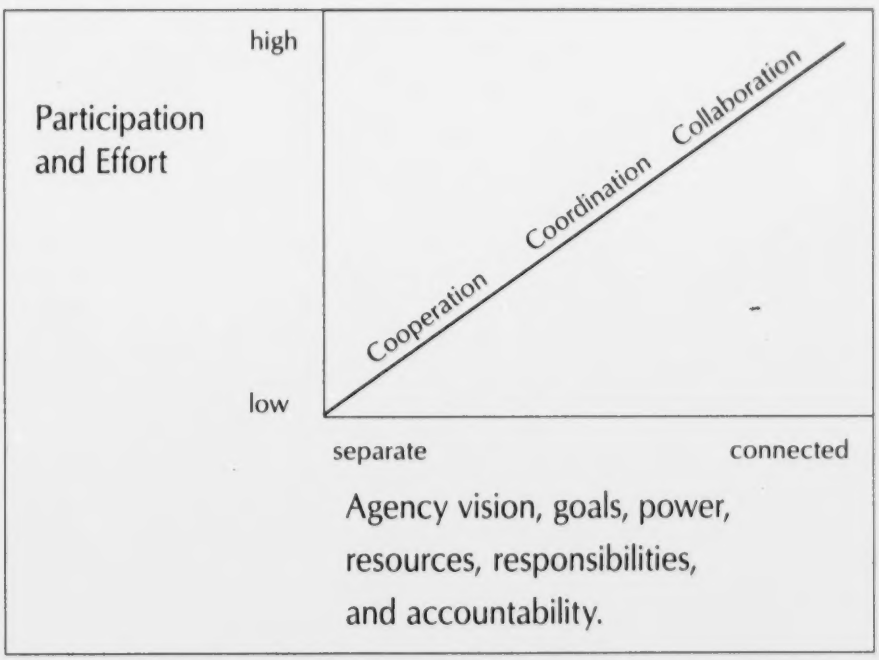


Figure 1. The Collaboration Continuum: Cooperation, Coordination, Collaboration

Collaboration is shared vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, accountability.

Collaboration is demonstrated by a high degree of participation, effort and connectness among the partners. Collaboration is achieved through strong connections by sharing vision, goals, intended results, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability among the partner organizations and with those we are trying to help (Melaville and Blank, 1991; IEL, 1992). On the other end of the continuum, cooperation is considered to represent a low degree of joint participation and effort and a high degree of separateness among agencies and schools. In the middle of the continuum, coordination is considered to represent a moderate degree of participation and effort and less separateness.

The ultimate goal of all three—collaboration, coordination, and cooperation—is to bring needed services together for the benefit of clients. Achieving this goal requires a shift in thinking and in practice, from agency-based services, which begin with the agency, to needs-based services, which begin with the client. Families become critical partners in service and empowerment.

If we operate from the philosophy that "It takes an entire village to raise a child," we begin to think about building community and cultural competence to strengthen the support for families all along the way. From this view, "working together" would include a broader scope of partners beyond schools and human service agencies, such as police, parks and recreation, transportation services, housing, and other community-oriented professions. Working with community demands new competencies and new programs that can cut across agencies, services, and professions as shown in Table 1.

Since there is no "one size fits all," collaboration agreements can be tailored to the interested partner agencies and organizations in each community based on the community's particular strengths and needs. The specific terms and parameters of collaboration are "spelled out" in the agreement based on degrees of participation, effort, and connectedness in the sharing of vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability among the partners. The collaboration agreements provide the ways and the means for different, and sometimes new, service arrangements for all the partners: clients, service providers, agencies, and organizations.

While program structures and administrative arrangements facilitate collaboration, the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of the individual practitioners determine how effectively services will be delivered and to what degree self-sufficiency for families is fostered. Skills in teamwork, facilitative leadership, and negotiation are necessary as shown in Table 1.

Collaboration: A vehicle for systems change

Collaboration is viewed by many as a vehicle for systems change. Collaboration means working together to reach goals that cannot be achieved or cannot be achieved efficiently or effectively by acting singly (Bruner, 1991). Collaboration means strengthening connectedness in terms of shared vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability to improve the well-being of children (Melaville and Blank, 1991; IEL, 1992). As we think about how a more effective system might work, Table 1 outlines some of the fundamental concepts and practices needing change as we move from traditional to more collaborative, integrated service delivery.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Systems: Traditional and Collaborative Service Delivery

TRADITIONAL, SEPARATE AGENCY SERVICE DELIVERY	COLLABORATIVE, INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY
Children and families as clients	Children and families as customers
Follow agency procedures	Help families solve problems
Turf-building	Partnerships
Separate agencies	Multi-disciplinary centers
Separate agency buildings	Flexible service sites
Authoritative leadership	Facilitative leadership
Protect turf	Negotiate solutions
Single agency vision and mission	Shared service vision and mission
Single agency goals	Cross agency goals
Competitive funding	Shared resources
Single agency accountability	Cross-agency accountability
Evaluation = number of clients	Evaluation = results for families
Accountability to funding source	Accountability to include community
Individual agency workers	Cross-agency team service providers
Narrow eligibility requirements	Flexible regulations
Separate applications & eligibility	Single application & eligibility
Separate data bases	Shared data base
Rigid confidentiality rules	Individualized privacy agreements
Office hours 8 am to 5 pm	Flexible hours based on customer need
Client sent to different agencies	One-stop shopping, single broker
Quick-fix solutions	Continuous improvement
Crisis-driven	Prevention-focused
Foster dependency	Foster self-sufficiency
Depersonalized	Personalized
Standardized menu of services	Customized services tailored to needs
Agency-based services	Needs-based services
Service delivery plans	Family goals for self sufficiency
"That's not my job"	"Whatever it takes"

Collaboration means shared vision, goals, power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability. It is also a matter of attitudes, skills, and knowledge of individual practitioners in delivering services effectively and fostering self-sufficiency in families.

Collaboration agreements are best used as "living" documents so as to capture more effective agency operations and service delivery arrangements, while at the same time not "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." That is, collaborative agreements seem to work best when they are carefully shaped along the way to preserve the best of the existing system while integrating the best of the new discoveries about what the partners are willing and capable of accomplishing together. What works in one community may not be the answer for another community. What works at one point in time within a community may not serve well as a long term solution. Things change: strengths and needs of the community change, leadership changes, availability of resources changes, and our knowledge and skills change as we learn.

Schools are vital community focal points

There is growing coherence in the state level policy framework bringing increased opportunities for communities to start early with families and to build some important safety nets and supports for the educational success of young people. Some communities are already creating new kinds of arrangements in order to bring together community resources to ensure that children can grow up to be responsible, productive, and fully participating members of society. The schools as primary institutions in the community are critical to the coordination and integration of services. This does not necessarily mean that the schools need to organize or operate all the services to be delivered, but the physical facility or the cooperation of the school administration are critical elements to integration and coordination efforts.

Across the nation, many communities see schools as vital focal points for service integration because schools are where the children are. In addition to the reforms in the classroom, links are being established between schools and other human services. These links are not meant to replace the traditional roles of families or teachers, but to provide vital support to both.

Full service schools (Dryfoos, 1994) as some are called, are seen as a cost-effective way to serve the community. Instead of spending money to build or maintain a separate facility, resources go directly to programs and services. Agencies and schools coordinating services with other community resources focused on youth (e.g., YMCA, parks and recreation) provide a means to leverage resources to avoid duplication and service gaps. For schools, making other human services easy to access can relieve some of the time pressures teachers face in their attempts to serve as teacher, guidance counselor, social worker, and nurse, thus allowing them more time to plan and prepare lessons. Offering family support and educational services can also build the capacity of families to prevent future problems and increase family self-sufficiency making educational dollars even more meaningful.

In the best scenario there are strong connections between schools and families, increasing the likelihood that families will actually use the new services in the school building when they are needed. In some communities, schools may not be the most convenient sites for bringing services together for families. It makes sense to bring services together where the families live who will use the services. Regardless of the site in question, a critical factor in determining whether or not families use needed services is that they not feel stigmatized or embarrassed. If a more distant site offers a warmer and more welcoming atmosphere for families, that site offers a better chance of working for families than a convenient but unfriendly location that no one will use.

The mission statements of many schools are based on the belief that all children can learn well. As we see complicated problems making it more difficult to reach so many young people, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction decided to take an in-depth look to find directions to help us better serve children and their families. A series of research projects was designed to start identifying strengths, defining the problems, and seeing where some of the breakdowns are. The research was designed and carried out jointly by NCDPI's Division of Development and Evaluation Services, consultants from the Instructional Services area, the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The key research question: Are we working together?

The key research question was: How can schools work more effectively with other human service agencies in North Carolina to better serve the needs of children and families? We first tried to define the research questions solely within the context of school. But children also need family and community support in order to succeed in school. Consequently, the research was designed to include schools, health departments, social service agencies, mental health agencies, juvenile courts, and families. We also decided to take a closer look at some emerging new models in our state where schools and communities are bringing education and family support services together.

The research design: Three perspectives

The Department of Public Instruction ultimately commissioned three research projects to look at education and human service delivery from three different perspectives: the service provider's perspective, the client's perspective, and the perspective of some pioneering collaborative initiatives in our state. Because of time constraints, state-level agencies were not involved in planning the research design. However, each of these agencies at the county level in the six counties

involved in the research agreed to participate in the study in the interest of the larger goal of improving collaboration and services to children and families. The researchers remind us that the courage and high level of commitment of these schools and county agencies must be kept in mind as we consider what they taught us, for the news is not always good (Noblit et al., 1993 a).

We asked ourselves: Why is this research necessary?

Could we not already answer our questions by looking at other states, we asked ourselves? Maybe. Knowing that the needs of families are growing in number and complexity and that many children are "falling through the cracks" of the current system was perplexing. We wanted to understand the nature of the problem and where the breakdowns are occurring. We found no current research that answered our questions about North Carolina. In an effort to grasp the full range of the problems, these studies were designed to include rural and urban, resource-rich as well as resource-poor and geographically diverse (coastal, mountain, central) parts of the state to see if these features made a difference in our findings. The similarities in our findings across all these factors and regardless of whose perspective was being reported, client or service provider, greatly increases our confidence in the findings as well as the value of the lessons as we chart our future course.

Section IV: The Findings: What Did We Learn?

The findings from the research have been grouped into three major sections. Part one discusses what the NC Department of Public Instruction learned about schools through further analysis of the research findings. Part two discusses the research findings about collaboration as a strategy to improve services to children and families and some of the major stumbling blocks in our current systems. Part three reports from the research findings the lessons we learned from twelve client case studies and from five emerging community collaboratives. These lessons provide valuable insights for new frameworks for working together to improve services to children and families. Concluding comments and suggestions for next steps are included in section four.

Part One: About Schools: What's Working? What's Needed?

The research identified certain areas of concern that are common to all five agencies involved in the local communities: schools, mental health, social services, health, and juvenile court. However, the research was designed to determine the general state of affairs in service delivery for school-age children and their families, opportunities for schools to collaborate with other human service agencies working with the same families, and possibility for breakdowns in service delivery. The NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) further analyzed the research reports for information pertaining to schools to guide efforts to improve educational opportunity and success for young people. The results of the DPI analysis about schools are discussed in this section.

Careful study of the research summaries revealed six major areas that may be of particular interest to schools. These six areas have bearing on the mission statements of many schools, which are based on the belief that all children can learn well. As schools work to carry out this mission, complicated problems, growing in number, are making it more difficult to reach many young people. Hopefully, shedding light on some of the perceived breakdowns will lead to better understanding of the nature of the problems and ultimately to more lasting solutions.

1. Schools first try to solve problems "in house"

School personnel are willing to struggle to find solutions, even with limited resources and time. They do this in several ways:

- *In-School "experts"*

  Schools hire resource personnel including psychologists, nurses, social workers, and counselors, who provide services similar to those in other human service agencies. This system evolved in schools partly in response to other human service agency systems being designed primarily for adult needs, not for children's needs. Over time, schools saw the need to address other aspects of student learning and these fields of practice in student support service areas emerged. School resource personnel often have special training and experience in applying their expertise in the school setting. Many times their training includes a special focus on the developmental and learning needs of children, a focus that is highly valued by schools.

- *Solutions that work in school setting*

  Because of their special knowledge and expertise specific to the school context, principals often find these "in house" experts valuable in crafting solutions that are workable in the school setting. On the other hand, other human service agency personnel often lack that experience and even a basic understanding of how schools work, and therefore their recommended solutions may not be feasible. Advice to schools, though logical and even creative from one agency's point of view, is of no value to schools if it will not work in that setting.

- *Flexibility with in-house experts*

  The school district's "in house" experts, though not accessible enough, are accessible on a more timely basis than are similar experts in other human service agencies. Because schools work with children on a daily basis, they cannot always wait for months to address a problem. Though these interventions are sometimes imperfect, schools have the authority to adjust their priorities at a moment's notice, when one student's needs become more pressing than another's. Schools have no control over the priorities of other agencies. Further, through their own informal means, schools can often cut through the "red tape" with their own personnel, but not with other agencies. Expediency is highly valued by schools.

- *Schools and agencies unaware of full range of community services*

  On the down side, many school personnel visited by the researchers had little information about services of other agencies, were unaware of interagency collaborative efforts, or were dubious as to their value. In fact, this was true not only for schools, but also for other agencies involved in the study. Though there are logical reasons why schools and other agencies function as they do, clearly there are lost opportunities and resources for children and families when schools and other agencies operate on incomplete information about what is available. Lack of communication among schools and other human service agencies may contribute to problems with duplication, fragmentation, and gaps in services. All stand to lose, but children and families above all.

2. *Need increased access to teachers and student support personnel in schools.*

The teacher is highly valued by all agencies and by parents both in understanding the nature and scope of a young person's needs and in being part of the day-to-day progress toward solutions. In fact, when other agencies do not gain easy access to teachers in order to give and receive information about shared clients, they consider this barrier a serious limitation to the degree of achievable success with the client. Agency workers and parents also view student support personnel as valuable contributors of information and as important links between the home, the school, and other agencies working with the family.

- *Need time in daily schedule for teachers to work with other agencies concerning shared clients*

  Teachers often do not have released time in their daily schedules to meet with parents or workers from other agencies. Further, teachers are generally not routinely available after school hours or during summers.

  Teachers feel torn within the little planning time they may have during the school day, understanding the competing, multiple priorities that need to be addressed in the best interest of the children in their classrooms. The number one expectation about the teacher's job, however, is clearly to teach the curriculum to students. To do that well, teachers must work on their own and with other teachers to plan rigorous academic content, challenging learning experiences, and effective instructional delivery techniques in order to reach the broad range of learning needs across the various students, classes, and courses taught during the school day.

  The work of most teachers does not stop when the last bell rings. Many teachers work after school to support the work that occurs in the classroom. Student assignments are reviewed and sometimes graded, daily lesson plans must be modified and organized based on each day's progress. Teachers have staff meetings after school, committee meetings, and staff training obligations as well as school and community leadership and service responsibilities.

- *Need to view teachers as front-line workers and "in the loop" with shared clients*

  Other agencies view teachers as the "front-line workers" comparable to their case workers. However, in the organization of schools, teachers often have limited involvement in cases. Teachers make initial referrals, but principals or other school staff manage the case after the initial referral. This is frustrating to workers from other agencies since they view teachers as being vital to the case—giving and receiving information and guidance regarding what is best for the young person. Likewise, teachers often express the sense of being left "out of the loop," saying they are usually not involved in decisions about what happens to children after making the initial referral for assistance.

- *Need more involvement of student support personnel*

  In addition to teachers, workers from other agencies report that student support staff, including social workers, nurses, guidance counselors, and school psychologists, have limited involvement in cases because many of them are itinerant, serving several schools, or working part-time for an entire school district.

3. Need technology to foster accessibility and timely communication

Accurate and timely information is a must when different agencies are working with the same client families. Technologies can, when properly applied, enhance a school's collaborative capability. These technologies include the telephone, computers, copiers, fax machines, electronic mail (e-mail), voice mail, and audio/video equipment. Technology cannot by itself cause collaboration, and thoughtless application might in fact hinder such attempts. But appropriate technologies can vastly improve the chances of collaboration while their absence can seriously hinder the work of those who serve children and families.

◆ *Access to telephones*

The most mentioned piece of equipment in this study was the telephone. The telephone was reported as the primary medium of informal collaboration among service providers. Teachers, student support personnel, and parents cite lack of convenient access to a telephone as a barrier to timely communication. Other human service agency workers cite lack of access to teachers and student support personnel by phone as a major barrier to effective service delivery. Paired with the availability of a telephone for communication and collaboration about shared clients is the availability of a private space for school staff to have telephone conferences when the need arises and confidentiality is an issue.

4. Need to communicate about child's life, both in and out of school

The communication needed is a two-way street. And timely, effective communication is often just as much a barrier within schools as it is between schools and other human service agencies. Increased use of technology within and between schools, as well as with families, can greatly enhance service delivery to children. The stronger the family in supporting the child's needs at home, the better chance the child has of taking advantage of learning opportunities at school.

Student support personnel often have access to specific and extensive written evaluations of a student's educational, social, and health needs as well as family and school history. Their involvement in cases may also have involved classroom observations and numerous consultations with teachers, parents, and other resource personnel, both within the school district and beyond it. This knowledge can provide valuable and necessary information to teachers and to other human service agencies as they work with families to design effective solutions.

Teachers work with children daily and have important understandings about children based on daily interactions and observations of students' work. Further, teachers and other school personnel are often able to meet children's learning needs more effectively when they understand more about what may be happening in the child's life outside of school. Without all the pieces to the puzzle, a child's behavior can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. These misunderstandings can lead to serious consequences for the child, both in and out of school.

5. *Need schools to be viewed as open systems*

In general, the findings across the three research reports indicate that our public schools are sometimes seen as closed systems, namely by those with whom they relate, clients and human service workers in other agencies. Part of this perception stems from clients and other agencies viewing schools as handling problems with students internally through existing educational and support programs established within the school system. A large part of the perception may stem from barriers related to lack of time to meet with other agencies and lack of timely, effective communication about shared clients. Here are a few other related issues:

- *Schools viewed as tending to only address educational problems, not root causes*

  As the issue is further defined, the concern is that the educational needs of students are addressed but the root causes of students' problems, usually not just educational, are not addressed. From the point of view of families and other agency workers, many times schools do not have all the information about family circumstances that may be contributing to children's learning needs. Hunger, homelessness, family violence, parent unemployment, and financial concerns all can be invisible to teachers who teach thirty to one hundred fifty students a day. However, without additional support, children may experience very negative effects on learning, achievement, motivation, and self-confidence from factors totally unrelated to the school environment.

- *Schools viewed as lacking follow-through with referrals of families to other agencies*

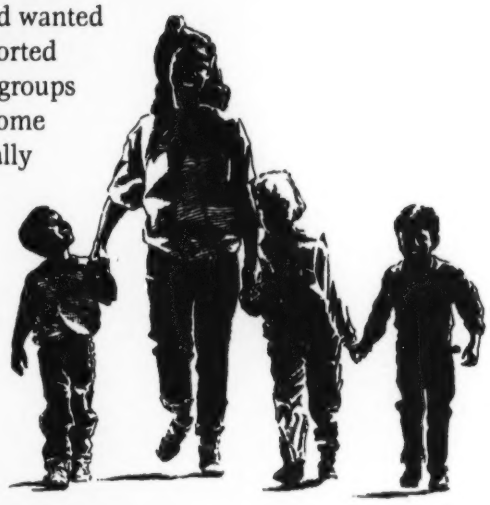
  When other problems are recognized, other agencies and parents report that school personnel tend to make referrals informally or to rely on parents themselves to make their own connections with other agencies. This way of doing business often results in a breakdown for families when they do not follow through or when they are met with obstacles like transportation or child care problems, complex agency requirements, or complicated agency language and terms they do not understand. Unfortunately, when things get too bewildering, many parents give up before getting needed assistance.

6. *Need schools to be prepared to teach **all** the children*

Clients in this study wonder whether or not schools are prepared and equipped to include children with special needs in regular classrooms. They reported how much they valued teachers who are compassionate, willing and able to work with children who are different, who have special needs, or who are burdened with life problems far beyond their years. Their stories demonstrate how far relationships with caring teachers can go in tapping a young person's optimal learning capacity and favorable attitude toward school.

Descriptions of complicated problems affecting their children's school performance and behavior are not all pleasant stories. Parents involved in the study sometimes reported feeling like schools

are "against" them and that they have to "push" to get help for their child. They reported wondering if teachers had "given up" and wanted to push their child aside in the "unhelpable" group. Some reported resorting to "outside" assistance from attorneys and advocacy groups in order to get special education services for their children. Some turned to private schools to find individualized and academically challenging curriculum and instruction because of a belief that special education classes generally do not teach a challenging curriculum.



The client's perspective, which is presented later in this report, seems to have particular relevance here and bears repeating:

> *Good people are more important than good programs. According to the client stories, most of the positive experiences with government services were told in sentences beginning something like, "There was one counselor who was very helpful," or "One teacher, I remember, really understood my child." Good services are, to some extent, good personal relationships. While these special people are often described as "nice," they are more than that—they get concrete results promptly, and they are flexible and accepting* (Noblit et al., 1993 b).

Part Two: Lessons About Collaboration and Our Current System

Lessons About Collaboration

For purposes of this study, those interviewed were asked to define collaboration for us. The variety of responses mirrored the literature's wide range. Similarly, there is no agreed-upon structure or process that marks collaboration, so the researchers were looking for any formal or informal arrangement or mechanism that seemed to bring together agency personnel in any way. Researchers have cautioned for decades that building collaboration is indeed difficult, which make successful arrangements more apparent as the remarkable achievements they are. Following are the primary lessons we learned about collaboration across the communities, schools, and human service agencies involved in this study. These findings are taken from phase one of the study, and are included in the research report entitled, **Lessons about Interagency Collaboration from Six Counties** (Noblit et al., 1993 a).

Collaboration is practiced in a variety of ways; no one best model exists.

The most successful examples of collaboration do not come from taking a "cookie-cutter" approach. Rather, they are highly adapted to specific local conditions. While many practitioners, for example, saw streamlining the process as a goal for collaboration, clients were concerned that the current process offers too little time for telling their stories and developing relationships with case workers. The most useful role the state can play in facilitating collaboration is to create a regulatory environment which allows all agencies to be as flexible as possible.

Collaboration means different things to different people.

In words and deeds, collaboration means many things. For some, communication and information-sharing is an adequate definition. For others, cooperation among separate agencies is sufficient so that each agency can do what it normally does more efficiently. True collaboration is harder to find. Agency workers rarely ask, "What will it take to make the client self-sufficient?" or "How can agency services work together to make client self-sufficiency possible?" While the literature teaches us there is no one best way to collaborate, developing some shared understandings about how collaborative service delivery will be defined by local agencies is an essential starting point.

Collaboration requires surmounting turfism and above all requires time and trust.

Promoting interagency collaboration will take considerable time, dialogue and planning. Agencies have different cultures, reasoning, and principles of decision-making which results in misunderstandings and in people with different levels of authority trying to collaborate. It is difficult to make firm decisions when the people involved have incommensurate authority. Some people can commit for their agencies, while others must refer the issue to a higher authority. Authority will need to be delegated to those involved in collaboration, and the collaborative will needs to carve out neutral space, clearly distinct from existing agency turf. From the clients' stories, it appears that agency logics, that is reasoning and decision-making principles, are communicated poorly to the public, leaving clients confused about how to use the system and angry about delays and redundancies. Learning to share power, resources, responsibilities, and accountability takes time and trust. The type of communication that is needed is not just for information, but also for understanding and problem solving.

People cannot collaborate on a solution unless they share a common understanding of the problem.

People involved in collaboration often bring to the table heavy baggage consisting of their own agencies' definitions of the needs of clients. If these understandings are not thoroughly explored, participants will continue to talk at and around each other, without necessarily acknowledging the same problems and issues. Time must be

invested up front in defining the goals of collaboration specifically, not generally. Although this may initially create conflict and controversy, failure to confront these issues openly leaves behind treacherous assumptions that might later resurface and cause the failure of the collaborative.

Interagency collaboration is sporadically practiced; the most effective forms are informal.

Existing interagency collaboration efforts in the study are limited. Where they do exist, it is apparent that a "two-tiered" collaborative system is at work. Formal collaboration is often limited to meetings of top administrators who design ways for the agencies to better serve clients. Informal collaboration typically is practiced by front-line service providers. Ironically, it appears that the two tiers often do not communicate with each other and at times seem to work at cross purposes. Informal collaboration results in more direct and timely benefits to clients. Formal structures that promote collaboration and integration of services, therefore, are more likely to be effective when they are designed with the input of front-line service providers.

In each county, informal networking worked best to bring services together for a particular client. Informal networking has many advantages including being unofficial and thus allowing for hypothetical and exploratory conversations, requiring no paperwork, and being time effective. On the other hand, recognized limitations of informal networking include high personnel turnover and legal restrictions. Confidentiality requirements are often mentioned as an obstacle. Informal networking is easiest when people have worked in other agencies and understand the other agencies' decision-making logics, their limitations and possibilities. Mandating collaboration from above tends not to work as well as does building on the existing informal relationships and understandings which exist between client advocates at different agencies.

Client contact workers need increased decision-making authority in order to most effectively help children and families in a timely manner.

The collaboration of front-line service providers requires those in authority over them to delegate more of the decision-making among service providers. The differences in rules and regulations, and agency strengths and needs also means that each community needs to design the processes that work best for all involved.

The best informal collaborators are client advocates.

Clients' good experiences most often are with service providers who act in a kind of advocate role, who both understand the problem and find real, lasting, and acceptable solutions through informal contacts. The best informal collaborators seem to share some personal characteristics, such as the following:

- client-oriented, finding what the client needs, not settling for what the agency normally provides .

- persistent, resourceful, and creative in assembling services and avoiding tangles
- trustworthy and willing to trust
- proactive in seeking services to prevent future problems
- willing to work with others, regardless of their professional status or authority
- committed to make new contacts, maintain existing contacts

To foster conditions that attract and retain these kinds of people as service providers, agencies must recognize and value characteristics such as persistence, trustworthiness, and resourcefulness in service delivery to clients. Designing, encouraging and rewarding cross-agency learning and apprentice experiences is a very powerful tool, as it adds to the number of people in any community who have cross - agency knowledge to solve problems.

Lessons About Our Current Syatem

The "form and function" of our current education and human service systems is based on the past. Over the years, well intentioned legislated mandates and programs have been added, layer upon layer, aimed at select problems and populations. The result is a "system" which all too often seems fragmented, cumbersome, complicated, and confusing, both for those who work in the system, and for those the system is intended to serve. The following findings are taken from phase one of the study, and are included in the research report entitled, **Lessons about Interagency Collaboration from Six Counties** (Noblit et al., 1993 a).

Employees everywhere are burdened.

With so many families in jeopardy, it is obvious that under the current system many children and families are not getting what they need. Bound by funding requirements and traditional ways of doing business, schools and helping institutions are caught in a crisis mode, waiting until needs grow into difficult problems, then working alone instead of coming together to solve problems.

It is not surprising our researchers found across the board that an overwhelming majority of employees want to find simpler, more effective ways to do their jobs and help those in need. Increasing, interrelated social, economic and educational problems are resulting in human service providers who are, on a large scale, burdened with too much to do and too little time. Employees everywhere feel pushed and pulled in too many directions. Complicated, time-consuming bureaucratic rules and procedures are at the base of the frustration expressed by many.

Regardless of agency, most employees expressed urgency, yet a sense of powerlessness, regarding the complete overhaul of our educational and human service systems. Repeatedly, from three different research perspectives, stories were told documenting a state of affairs where all too often, the things that matter most are sacrificed at the expense of things that matter least. It is not uncommon for complicated eligibility and service delivery procedures to receive more time and attention than helping clients solve complicated problems in a way that works toward a life of self-sufficiency.

Clients traditionally receive the services that agencies typically provide rather than the services they need.

Even when previously isolated agencies begin to work together, they often define collaboration in terms of more effective ways to "bundle" the services they already provide. However, collaboration provides an opportunity to go further– to rethink services beginning with client needs, not agency mandates. While better communication between agencies is desirable, by itself it does not address the fundamental issue of creating a more client-driven system.

The services the child and family receive are unlikely to reduce dependency on public agencies.

Since the services delivered are determined by what the agency has to offer rather than what the family needs, many problems go unresolved. Accessing needed services has become so complicated that those in need must have expert help just to navigate the system. The person in need is often left confused about how the available "piece of their puzzle" will fit with those remaining problems that the agencies cannot address.

Clients do not learn how to solve their own problems in the process. In fact, the complexity of the system and the brusque attitude of some of the service providers often leave the client feeling not very smart, unimportant, and at times, invisible. Further, laws, rules, and regulations change so often that clients who manage to learn some of the rules only find the rules change from year to year and from agency to agency. It is important for the client to be a partner in the design of the services and in the development of any service plan. They are then in a position to understand how all of the pieces will fit together to help them and to see where any gaps might exist. By learning what resources are available in the community and how to access needed services, people are in a better position not only to help themselves, but also to help their neighbors.

Agency service eligibility determination processes may contribute to stigma and fear on the part of clients towards the agencies that serve them.

Some clients are reluctant to seek assistance because they fear their needs being made public, as in the case of Food Stamps. Others are reluctant to seek assistance because the complex and time-consuming application process is more trouble than the resulting assistance seems to be worth. Still others are reluctant to seek services because they fear losing control over decision-making or becoming helplessly dependent on public assistance. Many clients say "the system" makes it easier to continue receiving public assistance than it does to become self-sufficient.

Within-agency collaboration determines extent of services more than between-agency collaboration.

For most clients, the key step in receiving services involves the single agency setting. Interagency collaboration is less likely to be initiated. The client's chances depend on how well single agencies can meet their needs. There is still much room to grow in the area of within agency collaboration, so that needed services are comprehensive, connected, simplified, easy to access, well coordinated, timely, and available during the hours of client needs.

Diagnosis receives more time and attention than treatment.

There is a lack of balance in the resources spent diagnosing versus treating or preventing problems for children and families. Diagnosis is an important part of treatment, but many times it seemed to be an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Agencies are structured to offer categorical rather than customized services and to design piecemeal rather than comprehensive solutions. Rather than just "delivering services," we must be accountable for seeing the client through until the problems are resolved.

Policy and law are interfering with collaboration.

According to the agency workers interviewed, some laws, regulations, and mandates require collaboration while others forbid it. Probably the stickiest area is confidentiality. Collaboration for most agencies is constrained because of confidentiality restrictions. Those agencies that have found creative ways to share client information when necessary are not sure that their strategies would survive legal scrutiny. Moreover, agencies sometimes find it useful to have the threat of legal sanction in order to get parents to cooperate with coordinated service delivery. The barriers related to confidentiality were so pervasive as to be a key issue to address formally statewide.

Part Three: Frameworks for New Designs

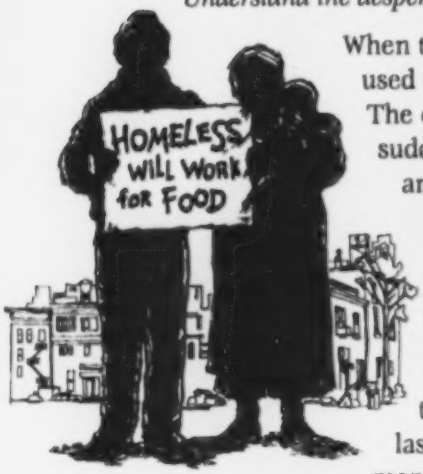
This section offers advice from perspectives different from those of the schools and human service agencies. The first part of this section outlines the advice given to us by twelve families who have relied on schools and human service agencies for needed assistance to varying degrees. The second part of this section outlines advice given us by emerging interagency collaboratives in our state based on the lessons they have learned while trying to change the way they do business, both with children and families and with the partner organizations in the collaboratives.

Design A Client-Driven System: Lessons from clients

These findings are taken from phase two of the study, and are included in the research report entitled, **From the Other Side of the Desk: Clients' Experiences with Government Services** (Noblit et al., 1993 b).

> This study involved case studies of twelve families who have been involved with multiple human service agencies. The results offer specific evidence of the real impacts—good and bad—which present policies have had on individual lives, impacts which may be complex or unexpected. The lessons distilled from these dozen stories offer perhaps unexpected insight that what is best and most logical in the agency's view is often seen very differently from the other side of the desk.
>
> Clients were specifically selected to represent a cross section of examples of a worst-case, a best-case, and a middle-case experience in each of the four counties selected, defined as such along a continuum from dependence to self-sufficiency. It was not by design that only women or female - headed families were selected. It happened that these women were judged in each case to best represent the criteria specified for the study.
>
> For purposes of the study, "worst-case" was interpreted to mean long-running and problematic dependence on multiple services, while "best-case" meant a person who soon expected to be self-sufficiency as a result of the help received from agencies. The strong emotions shared by these women indicate how important government services have been in their lives. Five "messages" emerge from the twelve stories, which roughly follow the client's experience from entry to exit.

Understand the desperation which first brings clients to ask for help.



When the clients described their first approach to an agency, they used words like "embarrassed," "afraid," "coerced," "degraded." The crises that precipitated their serious need were sometimes sudden—a job lost due to pregnancy or car problems, for example—while for others, their lives had long been difficult but had at last become unbearable. Most had previously tried to find help through family, neighbors, or their own resources before deciding to ask for government assistance.

The responses they remember from that first intake, and many later were being "stomped on," "judged," "given a hard time," "put down," and "intimidated." If first impressions are lasting, it is no surprise that such clients maintain a resentment toward agencies on which they must rely. Several described deceit as a consequence of their desperate situations. All regretted their dishonesties, but they shared them to illustrate the absolute need they felt when asking for government help. Further, they said that agency personnel rarely understood this desperation, offering little compassion even when material help was forthcoming.

Include clients in the process.

Though their need for assistance was often great, the women emphasized that this definitely did not mean they were willing to surrender control of their lives or of their families to receive that help. Mothers in danger of losing their children were especially sensitive on this point. "No one takes my kid away from me!" was one woman's cry, while others expressed similar insistence that they retain final authority where their children are concerned and similar frustration with a system which they perceive as disinterested, disdainful, or dismissive of their wishes.

While clients may overestimate the amount of personnel time which can be devoted to any one case, they know that meetings among agencies already happen—but without including the client: "They have these meetings. . .but we can't come," one client noted. Such "behind-the-scenes" contacts (which, incidentally, meet many definitions of successful collaboration) leave clients feeling isolated, ignored, and suspicious of agency personnel who share their secrets with others.

Remember that clients' best experiences are with individuals.

Good people are more important than good programs, according to the client stories. Most of the positive experiences with government services were told in sentences beginning something like, "There was one counselor who was very helpful," or "One teacher, I remember, really understood my child." Good services are, to some extent, good personal relationships. While these special people are often described as "nice," they are more than that—they get concrete results promptly, and they are flexible and accepting in the face of the situation presented.

Make information about programs and procedures accessible to clients.

A client cannot benefit from a program if she never hears about it. The stories feature a perhaps surprising number of instances when the client "accidentally" discovered a counseling group or educational opportunity that became an important step toward the improvement of her situation. Women who grew up "on assistance" may never seek newer programs; women new to a county may be unaware of local offerings; women who may not be able to articulate to a caseworker what they want will recognize a program that suits their needs when it is presented. A story of a client who only learned of the JOBS program because she wanted something to read in a waiting room should be taken as a lesson to avoid missing opportunities to reach potential beneficiaries. Remember also that when a client has no correct information, she in fact may believe misinformation—rumors, misinterpretations, and lies—which can damage further any chance of receiving appropriate services.

Once a client knows about a program, however, its procedures should be clearly explained to the client, from the start. "No one ever explains anything to me" may seem a poor excuse to some, but a recipient paralyzed by crisis or wearied by years of frustration may find actively seeking information impossible. Finally, it is only just that a client be apprised of her rights in the event of a dispute with the agency, and be given correct information about due process procedures and the offices involved in making formal complaint. A client armed with all the facts and details will be better able to make the necessary decisions, and she will appreciate the agency's openness in this respect.

Provide a vision of the client's eventual self-sufficiency.

While information about getting into a program may be scarce, information about how one eventually exits the system is far more elusive. The successful cases in each county point out this gap: While almost ready to go it alone, clients have no idea what that will mean. They ask, "When will they cut off my food stamps?" "How do I manage monthly checks when I'm used to weekly installments?" Especially for women who never saw their parents or friends live independently, without government services, this can be a bewildering transition to make. This vision should be realistic as well as encouraging, a message that says, "Yes, it will be hard to make ends meet with the new job, and you may need to arrange for your children to be cared for after school, but we will prepare you to face these challenges and we believe you will succeed."

Making it Work: Lessons from emerging community collaboratives

These findings are taken from phase three of the study, and are included in the research report entitled, **Current Collaborative Initiatives** (Noblit et al., 1993, c).

The five organizations included in this study have faced and overcome certain challenges of collaboration. They have come together across agency boundaries, public/private distinctions, and differences in approach and philosophy, to design comprehensive solutions to shared problems. They offer concrete models of how the dilemmas of collaboration can be worked through in order to reap its rich rewards.

Collaboration is an undeniably appealing model of service delivery, one which holds promise of making the work of school and agency personnel more coherent in working with families, of making services more humane and empowering for the clients, and possibly of saving money through increased prevention and increased efficiency. For all these weighty expectations, real-world experiences with collaboration are often frustrating or hard to pin down.

There is no easy blueprint for translating the vision of collaboration into a functioning reality. This study does not purport to provide blueprints. By its very nature collaboration must be structured by specific community needs. What the study does provide is some guideposts, some issues that five evolving collaboratives have faced.

The collaboratives studied presented a wide range of models and approaches, each with its own mix of direct service, coordination, infrastructure, and policy development. Each evolved a definition of collaboration specific to the needs and resources of their communities. The five groups studied, in the order they are presented in the report, are:

- Caldwell County Communities in Schools (CIS), an implementation of the national CIS model focusing on broad-based community involvement and mentoring to support at-risk students in school.
- Cleveland County Communities in Schools, which provides core CIS services supplemented by intensive family development in school-based Family Resource Centers.
- Cumberland County Coalition for Awareness, Resources, and Education of Substances (CARES), a community action group focused on coordinating and supporting substance abuse prevention-services providers with information, resources, and training.
- Uplift, INC, a comprehensive family support system based in the community and focused on family empowerment through direct services, community development, and policy advocacy.
- Wake County Children's Initiative, a "floating think tank" which brings agencies together to create policy for children's services which transcend traditional boundaries.

Following are common themes and implications from all the emerging collaborative initiatives. Although each group studied has a different take on what it means to collaborate and what makes it work, there are certain issues which they all had to face. In summarizing these issues a rough road map of the collaborative process emerges.

Recognize the ironic role of mandates.

Mandates from above played a somewhat ironic role in the development of the five collaborations included in the study. Although there was unanimous agreement that "collaboration cannot be mandated," mandates in several situations in fact provided the initial push toward collaboration. Necessity is sometimes the mother of invention, and sometimes people only begin to work together in the face of an obvious crisis or a budgetary imperative. Although a mandate may be what first gets diverse service providers around a table, it is not enough to sustain momentum. For

genuine collaboration to occur ownership and buy-in must be generated from below—from the people who will have to take the risks and do the day-to-day work. Often what a mandate does is give people the opportunity to define their common ground. Once this consensus has been reached, collaboration takes on a life of its own, often far exceeding the scope of the original mandate from on high.

Define and understand differences and similarities up-front.

All of these groups stressed the importance of early, open, and on-going communication among group members. There is a danger in being overly polite and trying to steer clear of conflict. Gaps in understanding or philosophy which are not explored early will come back to haunt the group later. As the group strives to come together they should be brutally honest about what they have in common and what they do not, establishing clear parameters for collaboration.

There are infinite degrees and definitions of collaboration, and group members must have a shared understanding of how far their collaborative endeavor extends. In reaching this understanding, it helps to be explicit about the missions and cultures of the agencies involved. Respecting these differences can help the collaborative as its members seek to carve out a shared mission and culture of their own.

One of the areas in which it is most crucial to be explicit is the definition of the "problem" which the group is trying to address. Who is the target population, and what are their most pressing needs? Don't just use safe language which is vague enough to encompass everyone's views; when it is time for action, differences will reassert themselves.

All of these groups found plenty of common ground from which to work, but they also emphasized that it is important to recognize differences where they exist rather than sweeping them under the rug. Frank conversation is also important as the group tries to nail down the specifics of how collaboration is to be practiced. Will the group focus on direct service delivery, coordination, and infrastructure, or policy development? Talking about the right mix early keeps everyone on track.

Establish neutral turf.

All of these groups felt strongly that neutrality was crucial to their success. Although it may sometimes be necessary to formally empower an existing agency for purposes of grant administration or other funding flows, decision-making autonomy for the collaborative group itself is a must. An autonomous structure creates a safe environment where agencies may practice innovative strategies without fear of losing in political or turf battles. If the collaborative is perceived to be under the inequitable control of one agency or group, participants will play defensively and collaboration will stall.

Autonomy may also make the collaborative more attractive and inviting to the community at large and particularly to service recipients. Traditional agencies come with a great deal of baggage and may be less able to get things done under their own banners whatever their good intentions. Neutral turf allows ownership to be established from the ground up. All of these groups felt that freeing funds to flow directly to collaboratives rather than through agency channels was a crucial next step in providing an environment where collaboration can flourish.

Remember that collaboration is a vision, not an organization.

The evolution of these collaboratives brings home the importance of focusing on a core vision, rather than concentrating on the particular structures used to implement it. All of these collaboratives went through many permutations of membership, organizational structure, and service mix, evolving in response to issues and opportunities. By holding fast to a commonly defined problem and a vision of integrated services, they were able to go through these changes without losing focus. It also helps to keep this in mind: as the organization grows, the day to day realities of *how* threaten to make people lose sight of the *why*. As long as people maintain their faith in the *why* the specifics of *how* can evolve without disturbing the core.

Involve the whole community, including the population you want to serve.

All of these groups demonstrated the rewards of taking collaboration beyond the level of inter-agency collaboration to genuine community collaboration. While there are clear benefits to traditional public agencies working together, the rewards multiply geometrically when private, non-profit agencies, community groups, businesses, and services recipients get in on the action. Broad and diverse participation tends to generate new perspectives on problems and solutions and create a sense of ownership and pride that emerge infrequently from formal bureaucratic structures. Involving service recipients in all phases of planning and implementation has the added benefit of empowering them to name their own problems and take responsibility for solutions.

A final word: PATIENCE!

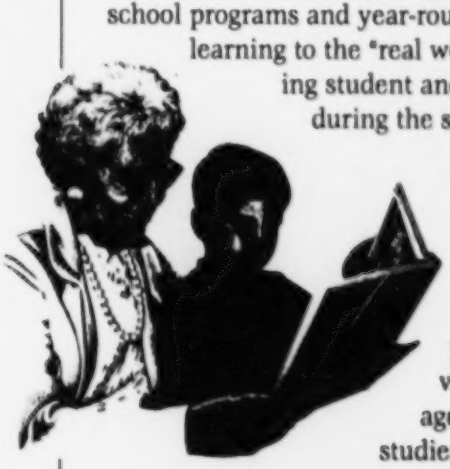
Nearly every participant in every collaborative studied volunteered that patience and perseverance are required to make collaboration work. Collaboration is sometimes sold as the "holy grail" of human service delivery and thereby burdened by unrealistic expectations. As exciting as the vision may be, however, it takes trial and error to make it work in practice. The transition from a period of activism and enthusiasm to one of increasing structure can be frustrating, but the collaboratives studied indicate that it is part of the normal organizational growth process. By constantly returning to the roots of their shared beliefs, collaboratives can maintain momentum. One useful strategy is to set achievable early hurdles rather than to set out to save the world. By building collaboration around a specific problem and/or population, groups can create tangible success stories which will make a solid core for enlarging and expanding their vision.

1. Consider schools that are "of" the community, not merely "in" it

Our schools' responsibility to children is not met simply by providing a program that works pretty well with most children. It is met when the school, the home, and the community surround the child with the support needed for success. Connectedness in schools and communities helps prevent young people from feeling and being anonymous. That is when they are more likely to fall through the cracks. Quite often educational problems are merely symptoms of more complex or pervasive problems, often involving conditions in the child's family. From research and from daily life experiences the lessons are the same: dealing with any problem separate from its more fundamental cause is short-sighted, leaving many needs unattended and possibly worsening over time.

Students and teachers are, for the most part, confined to the four walls of a classroom every day. They are isolated from others and from each other, disconnected from the real world, and lacking basic equipment like telephones, computers, and other forms of technology that enable and foster communication. The isolation of educators from other community agencies needs attention, as does the sense of confinement for students.

For students, lack of a sense of community within the school, and lack of "relevance" in what they are doing in school to what they do in life, are common complaints. Meaningful connections—with each other inside the school and to the world outside the school—can create powerful learning experiences for students and can add that "spark" to learning. In addition, before and after school programs and year-round programs can create opportunities to connect learning to the "real world." They can also create opportunities for providing student and family support services not traditionally available during the school day. These experiences can be for the purposes of student enrichment or "catching up," and they can be for the purposes of learning and support programs designed on a smaller and more personal scale.



Even when school personnel address educational problems from a broader framework, needed services are not immediately available from any agency's standard menu of services. From the case studies in these six counties we found that problems leading to chronic conditions such as delinquency, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, inadequate housing, and unemployment often go unattended because of the narrow range of services and

limited resources available in most communities. Even when services are available, other obstacles like lack of transportation, child care, and telephones are nearly always mentioned as serious barriers to service delivery.

Fulfillment of our commitment to children requires collaborative arrangements because the needs are too complicated and interrelated for schools, community agencies, or families alone to solve. In fact, acting alone, no one will succeed. We must be willing to address the roles of schools, community agencies, and parents, as well as turf and quality of care issues. We must address long-term financing so that we can see the ways to accomplish broad and permanent implementation of collaborative arrangements, instead of scattered pockets of hope.

In some communities in North Carolina and around the nation, however, necessary conditions are being created to successfully implement collaborative service delivery among agencies. These communities invariably foster creativity and some risk-taking, driven by a determination to offer more lasting solutions for members of the community and a better quality of life for all who live there. It is common in these communities for individual citizens, not just agencies, to perform important support functions and to serve as important links in the gaps that agencies do not fill. Ultimately what hinders or fosters collaboration is perception: perceptions about other agencies, perceptions about the right way to do things, and perceptions about the priority of client needs. Perceptions can be changed through experience and dialogue to increase understanding of client needs from all points of view.

2. Advice for players at the state level

The guidebook **Together We Can** (Melaville and Blank, 1993) offers valuable advice. Here's what they say about how state and local level actions can mutually foster improved well-being for children, families, and communities:

> Successful collaboratives are rooted in communities and closely connected to the state. Clear communication channels link them to the agencies that administer education and human services, the legislators who make key policy decisions, and the Governor's office. In 15 states, counties play a major role in administering the human services system. In the remaining 35, the states themselves provide services directly through state employees who function at the local level. In both cases, states have a critical role to play in creating a profamily system. States can foster change by:
>
> - *Spreading a Vision of a Profamily System:* States can specify the elements of such a system and champion that vision across the state. The vision should be flexible and adaptable to the special needs and concerns of each local jurisdiction.

- *Coordinating State-Level Policies, Regulations, and Data Collection:* States can create interagency task forces or commissions to coordinate policies and regulations among state-level departments and agencies. Reducing fragmentation at the state level helps to streamline service delivery at the local level. In addition, states can develop compatible data collection systems that make it easier for localities to compile and update interagency profiles of child and family well-being.

- *Streamlining Counterproductive Regulations:* States do not need to wait until localities ask for relief before exercising leadership. They can eliminate or simplify regulations they know are barriers to profamily service delivery. In addition, they also can develop mechanisms for acting quickly on specific local requests for waivers and exceptions to existing policy.

- *Exploring Innovative Financing:* States distribute federal entitlements such as Medicaid and child welfare funds. They need to work with localities to devise financing strategies that will assist local collaboratives to build a profamily system by taking full advantage of these opportunities.

- *Creating Incentives:* States can provide financial incentives such as special planning grants to encourage localities to collaborate. By the same token, providing incentives such as special professional development experience, relief from other duties, and flexible work assignments to state employees will ensure that localities get the help they need.

- *Developing Training and Technical Assistance:* States can support local collaboration by conducting regional training events. They also can develop information clearinghouses on the technical aspects of collaboration and provide assistance to help localities map the flow of state and federal dollars into their communities.

- *Convening and Networking:* States can create opportunities for local collaboratives to learn from each other and build mutual support networks. These forums can provide state policymakers and administrators with feedback on state efforts to support collaboration and identify areas in which state assistance must be changed or developed.

- *Supporting Research and Evaluation:* State dollars and technical expertise are critical in supporting the collection and analysis of local data on the needs of children and families and the effectiveness of new methods of service delivery.

Local collaboratives can encourage state efforts by:

- *Building Coalitions:* States are more likely to respond to a coalition of collaboratives that speaks in a single voice about the needs of children and families than to disparate demands from localities spread across the state. Coalitions can influence state policy and serve as a network through which people can share information and solve common problems.
- *Maintaining Close Contact With Legislators:* Local collaborators need to keep state legislators (as well as their federal counterparts) well informed about the progress of the collaborative.

3. There are no boundaries, we made them up

A young man recently sent us a powerful message when he said, "I wish you would look at me as someone who can do great things instead of someone you are preventing from becoming a delinquent." Creating solutions that work must begin with putting the human face with the data and putting teachers together with other service providers. We must begin with the person in need and not the category of service. To assess and categorize people for their weaknesses is not helpful to them. We must begin to look for strengths.

Lisbeth Schorr, in her book entitled, ***Within Our Reach***, argues for breaking the cycle of disadvantage, saying that we know what needs to be done and we know how to do it. Her reviews of research led her to the following conclusions:

Programs that succeed in helping the children and families in the shadows are intensive, comprehensive, and flexible. They also share an extra dimension, more difficult to capture: Their climate is created by skilled committed professionals who establish respectful and trusting relationships and respond to the individual needs of those they serve. The nature of their services, the terms on which they are offered, the relationships with families, the essence of the programs themselves—all take their shape from the needs of those they serve rather than from the precepts, demands, and boundaries set by professionalism and bureaucracies.

We must be willing to say some uncomfortable things in order to identify and solve these complex problems. To get to core solutions that are lasting, we must tell the truth about where we are. Rarely are we encouraged to learn from our mistakes because we feel we must deny we have ever failed.

We must take great care to understand the nature of the problems and we must not be satisfied to aim our solutions at the symptoms. The rush to action can add to the problem if we do not understand the multi-facetedness and interrelatedness of the problems. But we can no longer afford the types of programmatic solutions where we label the symptom, create a category for it, and think our work is done when the "fix" is in place. Fragmented, separately organized, physically scattered, and confusing services create serious barriers for school-aged children, as do different eligibility rules and lack of communication between professionals.

We must be willing to wrestle with new definitions of leadership to distinguish it from authority so that leadership can be cultivated in all areas. Our services and our organizational structures must be redesigned to reflect that caring does not always equal money and poverty does not always equal ignorance or lack of ability. It is likely that not all leadership will be "shirt and tie," and not all leaders will be well educated. We must make a place at the table for our clients when the problems are defined in order to get beyond the "symptoms" and understand the true nature and extent of the problems so that solutions will work in their lives. It is imperative to recognize that regardless of how long or short a time the clients receive needed services, nearly all express a strong desire for self sufficiency.

Finally, we must give things the **time** they need. Developing self-sufficiency within our organizations and our customers requires new ways of thinking and new ways of working together. It is most of all about developing trust and nurturing relationships. Those things require patience and commitment to be real about our solutions and to see situations through, all the way, until they work—and not to quit when things get tough.

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